

Record of Decision
USDA Forest Service

Prescott National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan
Environmental Impact Statement

Coconino and Yavapai Counties, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents my decision approving a land and resource management plan for the Prescott National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. The Forest Plan provides management direction for the Prescott National Forest.

This Record of Decision describes the selected alternative, other alternatives considered, and rationale for adopting the selected alternative. The environmentally preferred and most economically efficient alternatives are identified. Mitigation practices, monitoring measures, implementation procedures, and appeal rights are described.

DECISION

I have selected the Proposed Action Alternative for management of the Prescott National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

The Proposed Action Alternative will provide quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service. It is issue responsive, economically attractive, and environmentally desirable. This alternative protects watershed conditions, maintains a reasonable level of forage utilization, provides forest products on a sustainable basis, emphasizes recreation, allows access to resources, ensures adequate public assistance and law enforcement, provides a high level of quality wildlife habitat, and adjusts the forest boundaries in an orderly fashion.

The Forest Plan:

- Emphasizes watershed, range, fuelwood, recreation, and wildlife resources.
- Improves Forest-wide watershed conditions.
- Accelerates improvement of riparian conditions.
- Improves rangeland conditions by balancing livestock use with forage capacity and other resource needs and improving forage availability.
- Maintains forage capacity of highly productive areas.
- Provides a sustained yield of fuelwood.
- Reduces timber sales to the level historically sold. The average annual allowable sale quantity is 1.2 million board feet (including

.3 million board feet of products). About 2.4 million board feet per year have been offered for sale during the last 10-15 years. However, the average volume sold has been approximately 1.2 million board feet.

- Regulates Off Road Vehicle (ORV) use.
- Maintains developed recreation sites to a high standard.
- Improves wilderness management by expanding wilderness volunteer programs, law enforcement, trail maintenance, sign replacement and public education in the Granite Mountain and Pine Mountain Wildernesses.
- Improves overall cultural resource management.
- Obliterates 110 miles of road.
- Adjusts land ownership to better meet the needs of adjacent communities while consolidating Federal ownership.
- Maintains trails to a high standard.
- Fosters old growth forest conditions.
- Increases diversity using natural processes and vegetative treatments.
- Sells timber to meet wildlife habitat needs.
- Emphasizes State and Federal threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats.
- Uses prescribed fire in desert shrub-grassland and chaparral ecosystems to enhance wildlife habitat diversity and forage production.
- Recognizes the scientific values of the alder community at Grapevine Creek.
- Directs the study of Little Ash Creek for inclusion in the Arizona State Natural Area system and Gap Creek as a Research Natural Area.

Direction is provided through goals, objectives, multiple-use prescriptions, and standards and guidelines. The Forest Plan contains sufficient detail for planning and carrying out program level decisions. Additional environmental analysis will be done for site specific proposals. The Plan will normally be revised in 10 years but must be revised in 15 years. Revision means the entire planning process will be repeated and a new plan prepared. No decisions for use of land or resources beyond

10-15 years have been made. The Forest Plan does not address administrative operations such as personnel, purchasing or organizations.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

A wide range of alternatives was rigorously explored in the analysis process. This range included various combinations of amenity, commodity production and budget levels. Alternatives were developed which were responsive to issues, concerns and opportunities. Others were developed which explored the capacity to produce various outputs. Detailed consideration was not given to all alternatives.

This Record of Decision does not make a decision on the Proposed Copper Basin Land Exchange. A separate environmental impact statement will be prepared and circulated for public comment before a decision is made.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative A

Evaluates the effects of continuing current resource management and is the No Action Alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act regulations.

Alternative B

Strives to meet Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) objectives assigned in the Southwestern Regional Guide.

Alternative C

Evaluates the rapid resolution of conflicts between livestock grazing and watershed condition utilizing a strategy that eliminates grazing from 59% of the Forest.

Alternative D

Emphasizes economic efficiency using all activities as costs and all outputs which have either market or assigned benefits.

Alternative E

Emphasizes resource outputs with nonmarket values such as watershed condition, dispersed recreation, wildlife habitat and visual quality.

Alternative F

Portrays management of the Forest at a significantly reduced budget.

Alternatives Considered, But Eliminated From Detailed Study

A number of alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. Some were developed to determine effects of constraints and interrelationships of resource users. Others determined the capacity to produce individual resources.

The Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter also formulated an alternative which was modeled using the FORPLAN computer model but was not presented for detailed comparison with those listed above.

These alternatives and the reasons for eliminating them from detailed study are discussed in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Impact Statement.

REASONS FOR DECISION

My decision is based on evaluation of which alternative provides quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service while maximizing net public benefits.

Net public benefits and the quality of on-the-ground management were determined by evaluating how well each alternative responded to issues, by weighing environmental consequences as disclosed in the environmental impact statement, by assessing budget requirements, and by considering public comments.

The Proposed Action Alternative is selected because it provides the highest level of issue resolution in an economically efficient manner while providing for a high level of environmental quality. Therefore, it maximizes net public benefits.

Issue Resolution

Forest issues involve public perception of conflict between existing and desired conditions. Alternatives were developed to respond to the issues identified in the Environmental Impact Statement. Although all alternatives provide multiple benefits while protecting or enhancing environmental quality, issues are treated differently in each alternative and each alternative resulted in varying degrees of issue resolution.

While the selected alternative does not provide the highest resolution of some individual issues, it provides the highest overall resolution of the most issues. For example:

Watershed - The Proposed Action eliminates the acreage of unsatisfactory watershed condition more quickly than other alternatives. It also produces more riparian area in satisfactory condition. Water yield is greatest under Alternative B followed by Alternative E. The Proposed Action Alternative ranks third in water production.

Range - Alternative PA ranks second in the time required to balance grazing use and capacity and provides a practical approach that maintains a stable livestock industry. Alternative C provides immediate resolution of the difference between grazing capacity and permitted use. However, execution of this strategy may lead to appeals and litigation as well as significant disruption of the local livestock industry. The other alternatives do not resolve the grazing issue as well as the selected alternative.

Fuelwood - The Alternative PA produces the highest sustainable level of fuelwood harvest among the alternatives. Alternative A produces more fuelwood but not at a sustainable level. Alternative C produces nearly as much green fuelwood as PA but does not make effective use of the existing dead fuelwood inventory. Other alternatives would create fuelwood shortages in the vicinity of the Forest and do not resolve the issue as well as Alternative PA.

Recreation - Resolution of the recreation issue requires that an alternative address several aspects of recreation use and administration within the forest. Alternative PA ranks second in resolving the recreation issue. Alternative PA restores existing developed recreation facilities so that full service recreation opportunities are provided and maintained. Alternative PA also provides for new developed recreation facilities through a combination of private and public funding. Some of the dispersed recreation opportunities are managed at less than full service level. Some wilderness recreation opportunities are managed at less than full service level. However, those wildernesses receiving the greatest use are managed at full service level. Alternative PA best resolves the ORV portion of the issue.

Alternative D provides the highest level of recreation opportunity and best resolves the issue. However, Alternative PA better addresses six of the eight issues, and also provides for a high level of recreation issues resolution.

Transportation - Transportation issue resolution can be indexed by comparing the amount of funding available for the operation and maintenance of the road network with the mileage of roads necessary to implement the alternative. Alternative PA has the highest level of funding and best resolves the transportation issue.

Law Enforcement - Dispersed recreation, and to a lesser extent fuelwood, produce most of the law enforcement work load. When considering the collective work load, Alternative D best resolves the issue. The Proposed Action ranks second in law enforcement resolution because of

its combined resolution of recreation and fuelwood issues. However, the Alternative PA is preferred because it provides better overall issue resolution than D, and is environmentally preferable.

Wildlife - Habitat diversity is the best biological indicator of the overall quality of wildlife habitat and its capacity to sustain stable populations of wildlife species. Alternative PA produces the greatest habitat diversity and best addresses the issue.

Land Ownership - Alternative PA provides a new land ownership adjustment plan that best meets community needs and is best in addressing this issue.

The Alternative PA provides greater issue resolution than any other alternative. It provides the highest resolution of five of the eight issues and ranks second for the other issues:

| <u>Issue</u> | <u>Rank</u> |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Watershed | First |
| Range | Second |
| Fuelwood | First |
| Recreation | Second |
| Transportation | First |
| Law Enforcement | Second |
| Wildlife | First |
| Land Ownership | First |

The resource outputs and environmental effects resulting from the Proposed Action include many highly desirable results. For example it will:

- Eliminate unsatisfactory watershed condition more quickly than any other alternative.
- Contribute to the resolution of the livestock use issue by continuing the trend of improving the range resource condition. Grazing capacity will generally be increased. While reduction in permitted livestock is likely in some locations due to range condition, a viable livestock industry will be maintained. Adjustments in livestock numbers and management will be accomplished in the first decade.
- Fuelwood will be provided at the highest sustainable level. Saw timber and other forest products will be provided at a level commensurate with that purchased in the last 10 years.
- Provide dispersed recreation opportunities at a level above the historic level. Semi-primitive recreation opportunities will remain high. Existing developed recreation facilities will be maintained or reconstructed to meet operational standards.
- Provide the highest level of road maintenance.

- Contribute most to the resolution of law enforcement problems associated with ORV use, while maintaining adequate law enforcement for other Forest uses.
- Provide the most diverse and robust wildlife habitat. Significant progress will be made toward improving riparian condition.
- Provide for a high resolution of the landownership issues.

Most Economically Efficient Alternative

Alternative D is the economically preferable alternative. However, Alternative PA was selected because it provides better issue resolution and is environmentally preferable.

The selected alternative ranks fourth in present net value (PNV) which is the primary economic criteria for comparing alternatives. PNV is the difference between the discounted value of all outputs having a monetary value and total discounted management costs.

The difference in PNV between the Proposed Action Alternative and the higher alternatives (D,E,and F) is primarily due to differences in recreation outputs which provide the greatest contribution to PNV on the Prescott National Forest. The alternatives having higher PNV achieve increased recreation outputs by reducing investments in other resource activities and increasing investments in recreation activities management. This results in lower resolution of issues relating to the production of watershed condition, riparian quality, fuelwood availability, land ownership adjustment and transportation management.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferred alternative should possess qualities that reflect a stable and productive environment where natural forces are allowed to operate without adverse impact. Alternative PA provides the greatest opportunity for maintaining the natural forces in the environment in a manner compatible with humans. It provides highest level of improved watershed condition, riparian quality, and wildlife habitat diversity. It is equal to or better than other alternatives in maintaining visual quality, air quality, and water quality. Alternative PA is, therefore, the environmentally preferred alternative.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public was intensively involved in the development and review of the Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Information

meetings were held with a variety of interest groups and representatives. Over 100 people attended meetings. In addition, 82 written comments were received. Public comments resulted in the following changes in the draft Forest Plan:

- Standards and guidelines for riparian areas were clarified and expanded to facilitate recovery of riparian ecosystems.
- Use of herbicide for watershed management will require strict compliance with State water quality law.
- Range resource administration was intensified and clarified.
- Permitted livestock use was balanced with capacity.
- Increased management emphasis was given to Off Road Vehicle administration.
- Management of Cultural Resources is significantly enhanced. Standards and guidelines were added to comply with the Save the Jemez et. al. settlement agreement in the following areas of Cultural Resource Management:
 - Survey and inventory
 - Para-Archaeology qualifications
 - Protection and monitoring of sites
 - National register nominations
 - Data sharing
 - Site stabilization
 - Planning
- Increased management will be provided to the Granite Mountain and Pine Mountain Wildernesses.
- Fire management policy within wilderness areas has been modified to use prescribed fire where it is necessary to protect life and property.
- Visual quality requirements were added to timber harvest guidelines.
- Essential habitat has been delineated for Spikedace and Bald Eagles.
- Old growth habitat requirements have been further defined and clarified.
- Old growth definitions were added for Pinyon Juniper.
- Raptor nest buffer requirements have been specified.
- Timber sales will be more precisely directed at enhancing wildlife diversity through standards and guidelines that allow for unevenaged management and promote production of old growth timber.

- Common variety minerals permits will only be granted where visual quality objectives can be met.
- The use of prescribed fire will be guided by application of visual quality objectives near key viewsheds.

Numerous other suggestions and technical corrections were incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan. Detailed documentation can be found in the response document which accompanies the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

- Improved wildlife habitat will be achieved through integration with other resource activities and direct habitat improvements. Management indicator species will be monitored to insure that desired future condition of wildlife habitats is achieved. Habitats for State and Federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species will be managed with the objective to remove these species from their respective listings.
- The following wildlife needs are provided through standards and guidelines: diversity; old growth stands; snags; big game cover on both summer and winter ranges; raptor nest buffers; turkey roost trees; squirrel nest trees; edge contrast; down/dead logs; protection of total areas; wildlife forage allocation.
- Insect and disease conditions will be monitored on a continuing basis. Integrated forest protection methods will be used for prevention and control of insects and diseases as appropriate.
- Minerals and oil and gas activities will be managed through plans of operation to insure environmental and other resource needs are protected while developing these needed resources.

MONITORING

Implementation of the Forest Plan will be monitored as described in Chapter 5. The purposes of monitoring are to evaluate whether the Forest mission, goals and objectives are being realized and to determine how effectively management standards and guidelines have been applied. At specified intervals results will be evaluated. The results of monitoring and evaluation will measure progress of the Forest Plan implementation and will help determine when amendments or revisions are needed.

MITIGATION

The following mitigation requirements for maintenance and enhancement of environmental quality are incorporated into the standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan:

- Watershed protection and enhancement are provided for through "Best Management Practice" standards and guidelines, and cooperative balancing of livestock use within forage capacity.
- Priority will be given to balancing permitted grazing use with forage capacity. This will be accomplished cooperatively through adjusting the terms of grazing permits, management, and/or by increasing range capacity.
- Areas needing protection from motorized vehicle use are identified and appropriate management direction will be applied. If motorized vehicle use in specific areas results in unacceptable resource damage, they will be closed to motorized use.
- Recreation opportunities are provided with levels of service appropriate to the type and extent of use expected. Standards and guidelines for recreation will maintain or improve condition of air, soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources.
- Visual quality is provided through the visual resource management objectives. Additional standards and guidelines provide direction to maintain or enhance visual quality as an integral part of other activities.
- Management and protection of cultural resources is assured through standards and guidelines that provide compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and for coordination with State historic preservation planning. Provisions are made for site protection, National Historic Register nominations, and interpretation of cultural resources.
- Standards and guidelines for wilderness management provide for: a preservation of visual quality objectives; managing all uses within capacity; minimum impact no-trace use of wilderness; and using prescribed fire with planned and unplanned ignitions to meet wilderness objectives where it is necessary to protect property and human life.

IMPLEMENTATION

Continued public participation will be encouraged during implementation. Environmental analyses of site specific projects and monitoring activities will provide opportunities for public participation. Watershed condition, water yield improvement, riparian condition, range condition, timber sales, and wildlife habitat are expected to maintain a high level of public interest. Input and advice from the public will provide valuable perspective to land managers implementing the Forest Plan.

A separate environmental impact statement will be prepared for the proposed Copper Basin Land Exchange and that proposal is not included in this Forest Plan.

The budget for the Forest Plan is an estimated annual average for the 10-15 year life of the Plan. It is made up of broad averages and annual investment initiatives. Annual budget requests will be based on the Forest Plan. However, if appropriations are less than requested, modified rates of implementation and additional operating efficiencies will be examined so that planned on-the-ground results will be achieved. Individual projects will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of multiple use objectives prescribed in the Forest Plan. Individual projects may be implemented where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet multiple use objectives established by the direction in the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement and this Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Forest Plan the first year of implementation. Existing projects as well as contractual obligations will continue as planned.

As soon as practicable after approval of the Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Forest Plan. Subsequent administrative activities affecting such lands, including budget proposals, shall be based on the Forest Plan. The Forest Supervisor may change proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and appropriated funds. Such scheduled changes shall not be considered a significant amendment to the Forest Plan. Changes significantly altering the long-term relationship between levels of multiple use goods and services compared to those projected under actual appropriations may be significant amendments.

The Forest Supervisor may amend the Forest Plan but must determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the plan. If the change is determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor shall follow the same procedure as that required for development and approval of a Forest Plan. If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of National Environmental Policy Act procedures.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision, is subject to administrative review in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be made in writing and submitted to Sotero Muniz, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service, 517 Gold Avenue SW., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102, within 45 days from the date of this decision. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.

Sotero Muniz

SOTERO MUNIZ
Regional Forester

AUG 04 1987

Date